

USDA Hazardous Materials Management Program
Strategic Plan for FY 2003-2007
February 19, 2003

Context of This Plan

State and local economies rely on USDA-managed lands for the many benefits and services they provide, including drinking and irrigation water, fishing, camping, boating, swimming, hiking, and subsistence hunting and gathering. Each year, tens of millions of people from all over the world take advantage of the recreational and other opportunities the National Forests and National Grasslands offer. However, many ecosystems and watersheds are not in good health. Some streams can't even support aquatic life, let alone serve as safe water supplies. In Southeastern Idaho, hundreds of square miles of public (and private) land are off limits to livestock grazing due to the high levels of selenium in soils, water, and vegetation. In many cases, ecosystem and watershed restoration efforts cannot succeed unless mine-scarred lands are first healed.

Rural communities themselves are not exempt from the effects of environmental contamination. Thousands of "brownfields" – failed industries and businesses, old grain storage bins, obsolete animal dip vats, and closed gasoline stations – are continuing sources of environmental contamination, threats to residents' health and well being, and major impediments to economic development or redevelopment. A major lender in many communities, USDA also loses when brownfields blight sets off a string of business failures and loan foreclosures, neutralizing or destroying the benefits and intent of loans, grants, and other USDA assistance to rural communities.

The petroleum products and hazardous substances that fuel our prosperity can, in a heartbeat or over many years, pollute the environment, threaten health, curtail economic activity, and disrupt safety and security. It does not matter whether the incident resulted from an accident or an intentional act. There is a never-ending need to prepare for, guard against, and effectively respond to the incidents that regularly arise during the manufacture, transport, storage, use, or misuse of hazardous materials. This is as true for the thousands of USDA facilities as it is anywhere else.

Our Mission

The mission of the Hazardous Materials Management Program (HMMP) is to:

- a. aid in the cleanup and restoration of USDA-managed lands and environmental contamination resulting from past USDA activities to enhance environmental security;
- b. contribute to USDA and other efforts to improve the quality of life for rural Americans;
- c. participate in Federal, state, and local efforts to effectively plan and prepare for and quickly respond to discharges of oil and releases of hazardous substances, pollutants, and contaminants, regardless of the cause of the incident;
- d. seek compensation from, or cleanup by, those responsible for contaminating USDA-managed lands; and
- e. enhance USDA's environmental performance and the quality of the work environment for employees and cooperators.

The HMMP mission directly supports USDA's Strategic Plan, including Objective 5.1

(implement the President's Health Forest Initiative and other actions to improve management of public lands) of Strategic Goal 5 (protect and enhance the Nation's natural resource base and environment); Strategic Goal 2 (support increased economic opportunities and improved quality of life in rural America); and Strategic Goal 3 (enhance protection and safety of the nation's agriculture and food supply).

Our Vision

USDA is recognized as a leader in environmental management; environmental cleanup; and preventing harm to the environment or human health, safety, or security from releases of hazardous materials or substances, regardless of the cause of the incident.

Plan Preparers

Only Federal employees were involved in preparation of this strategic plan.

Finding The Plan on the Internet

This strategic plan and other information on the HMMP is at <http://www.usda.gov/da/hmmg>.

Our Values and Guiding Principles

- USDA will take responsible action to clean up contaminated sites that resulted from our activities, thereby reducing threats to human health and the environment.
- As articulated by the President, "We must confront the tough problems, not avoid them. We are here to serve the public's long-term interests, not just to apply quick, short-term fixes."
- We cooperate in Federal, state, and local efforts to plan for and respond to threats or harm to human health, safety, or security; natural resources; and the environment resulting from accidents and the acts of others.
- We maintain a proactive program that depends on our initiative, not the initiative of or threats of action by others.
- We use common sense, consultation, and the best available information and technology to make decisions and achieve results at the lowest possible cost to the taxpayer.
- We effectively use appropriated funds by working cooperatively with other Federal agencies; state, tribal, and local governments; citizen groups; and private parties on joint cleanups, and by selecting proven remedies and innovative technologies whenever appropriate.

Strategic Goals and Objectives of the HMMP

Goal 1: Provide effective services related to the environment to USDA constituents with decisions based on the best available science and efficient management.

Objective 1.1: Effectively meet responsibilities for environmental cleanup and related compliance activities on USDA-managed lands and at other sites where USDA activities cause unacceptable threats to human health or the environment.

Under both the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), USDA may bear responsibility for environmental contamination that threatens human health or the environment on USDA-managed lands (regardless of who caused the contamination) and at other sites that resulted from USDA activities. USDA employs a systematic process that is consistent with the CERCLA National Contingency Plan and other relevant and appropriate methods, criteria, and authorities to investigate and address contaminated sites. In addition to the natural-resource benefits of this work (USDA Objective 5.1), key objectives include improving resource and environmental security (USDA Goal 3) and the quality of life in rural America (USDA Goal 2). Sources of funding for this objective include targeted Hazardous Materials Management Appropriation funds and general agency appropriations.

Performance Measures for Achievement of HMMP Objectives:

Number of non-mine CERCLA cleanups completed.

Baseline: On average, 34 CERCLA sites were cleaned up each year from 1995 through 2002.

Target: Complete non-mine CERCLA cleanups on a total of 50 sites between 2003 and 2007. If this target is met, the cleanup program for non-mine CERCLA sites located on USDA-managed lands known to exist in 2000 will be substantially complete.

Number of CERCLA cleanups of abandoned and inactive mines and mining-related (AIM) sites completed.

Baseline: On average, 12 AIM sites were cleaned up under CERCLA requirements each year from 1998 through 2002.

Target: Exceed this average by completing a total 100 AIM CERCLA cleanups from 2003 through 2007. If this target is met, on the order of five (5) percent of the total CERCLA AIM cleanup program will be complete. Achievement of this goal is heavily resource dependent.

Number of cleanup plans completed for CERCLA sites determined to require CERCLA cleanup.

Baseline: On average, 17 cleanup plans were completed each year from 1999 through 2002.

Target: Maintain this average by completing the CERCLA cleanup plans for a total of 85 sites from 2003 through 2007. At this pace, cleanup planning may become a program bottleneck, with too few cleanup plans being produced to gain acceptance from USDA's constituents and stakeholders.

Number of sites with potential contamination investigated to determine the need for CERCLA cleanup, the least-expensive step in USDA's environmental cleanup program.

Baseline: On average, 95 CERCLA investigations of sites potentially requiring CERCLA response action were completed each year from 1995 through 2002.

Target: Slightly exceed this average by completing investigations on a total of 500 sites from 2003 through 2007. It is estimated that 80-90 percent of these investigations will support decisions that no further response action (e.g., site cleanup) is needed. The other 10-20 percent of sites are expected to require some kind of response action.

Number of agreements reached with potentially responsible parties (PRPs) for CERCLA cleanups on USDA-managed lands.

Baseline: On average, 10 agreements were negotiated with PRPs each year from 1995 through 2002.

Target: Maintain this average by negotiating 50 cleanup agreements with PRPs from 2003 through 2007.

Estimated value of environmental cleanup/restoration work performed by PRPs (\$millions).

Baseline: On average, \$28 million of work was performed by other responsible parties from 1995 through 2002, with one year slightly exceeding \$100 million.

Target: Secure a minimum of \$25 million worth of cleanup work from PRPs from 2003 through 2007.

Actionable Strategies:

- Promote partnerships with federal and state agencies, tribal organizations, and private parties in prioritizing, planning, and carrying out environmental cleanups and related activities.
- Conduct all work in a manner consistent with the CERCLA National Contingency Plan (NCP), codified at Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 300.
- Identify and give appropriate priority to environmental cleanups that advance other HMMP and USDA objectives regarding environmental security and economic revitalization of rural America.
- Clean up contaminated sites to support other USDA goals and initiatives relating to the health and security of natural resources, overall environmental quality and security, the quality of life in rural areas, and the safety of the Department's workforce and the general public.
- Seek appropriate contributions towards cleanup costs from those responsible for the contamination before HMMA or other appropriated funds are used.

Key External Factors:

Cleanup and restoration of sites causing environmental contamination are often complex, expensive, and time-consuming activities. They typically require protracted efforts to coordinate with other Federal agencies, states, and stakeholders, even for sites affecting only USDA-

managed lands. There are more than 2,000 sites on USDA-managed lands remaining to be cleaned up. The working cost estimate to complete the cleanup program exceeds \$4 billion. The sheer number of sites, high cleanup costs, and limited funding make it difficult for USDA to proactively address them within acceptable time frames. Policy considerations and economic conditions in the mining industry, which accounts for most of the remaining contaminated on USDA-managed lands, may make it difficult to maintain an acceptable pace of environmental cleanup, which can bring enforcement actions and lawsuits against USDA even when the problem resulted from others' actions.

There may be a substantial number of contaminated sites that are not located on USDA-managed lands that resulted from historical USDA activities. If this proves to be the case, diverting the necessary resources to address them in a timely fashion may jeopardize the cleanup program for USDA-managed lands. The priority and pace of cleanups off USDA-managed lands will most likely be far less under USDA's control.

Human capital deficits resulting from retirements, collateral-duty and emergency assignments, and frequent personnel changes may hamper the cleanup program. Environmental cleanups require highly trained personnel, timely legal assistance, and active program and financial oversight (including cost management and financial accounting) to ensure cost effectiveness.

Objective 1.2: Promote, sponsor, and provide assistance to public and private efforts under the Administration's brownfields and mine-scarred lands initiatives.

Brownfields sites and abandoned and inactive mining sites are often rural communities' millstones. They are continuing sources of environmental contamination; they threaten residents' health, livelihoods, and well being; and they stymie economic development and redevelopment. Addressing such sites is truly a win-win-can't lose proposition for USDA, which has often loaned much of the money lost in these communities' business failures and foreclosures.

Performance Measures:

Actively participate in the programs authorized by the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act (the Act) and other relevant environmental initiatives.

Baseline: In 2002, HMMG participated in planning and implementing National and USDA brownfields and mine-scarred lands initiatives.

Target: HMMG, in coordination with the Rural Development mission area, is a full partner with the Environmental Protection Agency in the award of 50 percent of all grants and contracts under the Act.

Actionable Strategies:

- Promote use of “brownfields” and other environmental programs and initiatives intended to spur redevelopment and improve environmental health and economic vitality in rural communities.

Key External Factors:

The sheer number and complexity of brownfields and mine-scarred sites, as well as the lack of USDA control over many of these sites, make it difficult to effectively respond to this challenge. Community priorities may not always align with USDA needs and priorities.

Objective 1.3: Promote and participate in National, state, and local efforts to plan for, prepare for, and respond to discharges of oil and releases of hazardous substances, contaminants, and pollutants, whether accidental or intentional.

Performance Measures:

Maintain USDA participation in planning, preparation, and response efforts under the National Response System and parallel efforts to ensure the health, safety, and security of people and the environment.

Baseline: In 2002, HMMG represented USDA on the National Response Team (NRT) and coordinated USDA participation in other parts of the National Response System.

The focus is increasingly on homeland security issues.

Target: HMMG participates to an appropriate degree in planning, executing, and evaluating plans, policies, exercises, and response actions within the mission of the NRT and National Response System.

Actionable Strategies:

- Continue to be a full partner in the work of the NRT and initiatives to improve the effectiveness of the rest of the National Response System.

Key External Factors:

Human capital deficits resulting from retirements, collateral-duty and emergency assignments, and mission and personnel changes can hamper effective planning and delivery.

Goal 2: Increase the stock of USDA’s corporate good will through improved environmental performance.

Objective 2.1: Reduced costs and risks (including security risks) associated with storage and use of hazardous materials and the generation and disposal of hazardous wastes in agency operations.

Performance Measures:

Increase use of environmental management systems and pollution prevention in USDA with the goal of improving environmental performance.

Baseline: In 2000, USDA and its agencies launched a process to implement environmental management systems (EMSs) in accordance with Executive Order 13148 and guidance from the Council on Environmental Quality.

Target: Complete implementation of Executive Order 13148 within USDA between 2003 and 2007.

Actionable Strategies:

- Develop and implement EMSs, including appropriate environmental auditing, to ensure that key elements of environmental performance are measured and evaluated.
- Adapt the “product stewardship” goals for environmental performance from the private sector to Federal programs and activities.
- Develop methods to monitor the value of USDA’s stock of good will.
- Expand annual “safety” inspections to include environmental and security issues.
- Develop and implement methods and criteria for identifying, evaluating, and selecting effective pollution-prevention proposals and projects.
- Incorporate environmental justice concepts and goals into USDA missions and programs.

Key External Factors:

Resistance to change is the leading impediment. However, there is a broad public expectation that Federal agencies will demonstrate leadership in complying with applicable environmental regulations and working to improve their environmental performance.

HMMP Contributions to Responses to Major Management Challenges, Program Risks, and the President’s Management Agenda (PMA):

Migration from a manual program tracking system to a data base is planned for FY 2003 and 2004. This action will improve financial management, upgrade information technology, and advance the President’s goals concerning budget and performance integration.

HMMP staff will continue to play a leading role in USDA security efforts, including safeguarding facilities, protecting the general public, and enhancing USDA’s capacity to respond effectively to intentional or unintentional incidents.